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SUBJECT: UNESCO - PREAH VIHEAR TECHNICAL MEETING PARIS

1. (SBU) Summary: Without the Thai or American experts present, UNESCO's Culture Sector organized a two-day technical meeting on Preah Vihear in Paris March 25-26. It was clear that there are many serious issues that have not been thought through by the Cambodians. These will require agreement with the Thais if they are to be successfully resolved. End summary.

2. (SBU) The US Mission to UNESCO sent its political specialist to sit in on the afternoon session of the first day of discussions of the technical meeting on Preah Vihear. The US Mission representative did not take the floor in the discussions, but simply introduced himself and said he was there to listen.

3. (SBU) According to Giovanni Boccardi, Unit Chief for East Asia and the Pacific in UNESCO's World Heritage Center, UNESCO's Phnom Penh field office had been informed by the Thai government last Friday by letter that they would not be attending the meeting. The US Mission informed Francoise Riviere's office, UNESCO's ADG for Culture, on Friday by e-mail that the US expert, Richard Sussman, would not be attending.

4. (SBU) Despite this, the agenda for the meeting was not revised, and time had been set aside for presentations by both the Thai experts and Richard Sussman. Although Mr. Sussman was not physically present, his name was invoked continually during the presentations and discussions.

5. (SBU) While Mr. Boccardi represented ADG Riviere, who launched the meeting with a brief welcome, Professor Azedine Beschouch, Special Advisor for Cambodia to the ADG Culture, was clearly running the meeting. Beschouch did his best to push the two Cambodian representatives present, Mr. Ty Yao, President, Cambodian National Authority for Preah Vihear, and Mrs. Tan Theany, General Secretary of the Cambodian National Commission for UNESCO, to accept a number of changes to Cambodia's proposal for the World Heritage Committee.

6. (SBU) The other experts present were Professor Koenraad Van Balen, Director of the Centre Raymond Lemaire at the University of Leuven, Belgium, Mr. Antoine Bruguerolle, Heritage architect, France, Mr. Michel Verrot, Advisor to the Royal Government of Cambodia, and Dr. Divay Gupta, Heritage Specialist, India. Mr. Feng Jing, Program Specialist from the World Heritage Center's East Asia and Pacific Unit was attended the meeting. Finally, Messrs. Blaise Kilian and Philippe Delanghe from the UNESCO field office in Phnom Penh were also present.

7. (SBU) Dr. Gupta spoke on the 35 action projects that he had identified requiring work at the Preah Vihear site. Mentioning the

demining of the area surrounding the site, Dr. Gupta said that he believes some 80 percent has now been demined, adding that the specialists doing the work had previously demined the Angkor Wat temple, and have experience in working in archeological sites. He also mentioned that the Chinese had begun work on the new road to the Preah Vihear site, while claiming that no decision had been taken about the final end point of the road.

¶18. (SBU) Mr. Bruguerolle spoke about the need to define a 10 square kilometer protected area around the site in order to ensure the preservation of the zone. When asked about the number of people now living in the area, Mr. Yao was unable to provide any clear answers. Beschauouche pushed him hard to find out if the Cambodians have any legal authority to restrict people from settling in the zone today. Yao said that a royal decree would be needed, and that such a decree would take at least a month or two to arrange.

¶19. (SBU) Beschauouche was quite aggressive with the Cambodians on several issues where they have not yet taken decisions needed to present the site inscription in the best possible light. Beschauouche repeatedly asked that various photos and maps be changed, and that references to an "aerodrome" be dropped to ensure a positive response from the World Heritage Committee.

¶10. (SBU) Several times during the discussion, Beschauouche told the Cambodians that they would need to negotiate specific issues with the Thai, particularly in connection with access to the welcome center from both countries, and the general issue of capacity, in terms of cars, shuttles, and tourists. Mr. Yao and Mrs. Theany listened carefully, but very clearly were not prepared to give substantive answers to any of Beschauouche's questions.

¶11. (SBU) Comment: UNESCO's decision to hold this meeting, despite the absence of both the Thais and the American expert, gave the impression of real desperation in the Culture Sector's front office. The Cambodians would appear to be deluded if they believe that the current dossier will be accepted without major revisions that will require lengthy negotiations with the Thai government. The heavy French representation was noteworthy (the proceedings were conducted in French, for example), but demonstrates the importance of the Preah Vihear project both here in Paris and at UNESCO. End comment.
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